

# Watsonville's new post office still hanging fire

By DAN FITCH  
STAFF WRITER

Design plans for a new post office in Watsonville may proceed as planned, despite the possibility of massive cuts in the U.S. Postal Service's budget.

But, while designs for a new post office on the 200 block of Main Street may proceed, construction could be held up indefinitely.

"We are in the design phase in Watsonville and we will continue with that phase, which will take a while," Postal Service Communications Director Gus Ruiz said yesterday afternoon. "But construction is a totally different phase. Problems with

our budget would delay actual construction."

Any changes in the Postal Service's plans, and ultimately Watsonville's, rest on the outcome of a Senate deficit reduction bill that, if passed, will result in cuts in the federal budget — including the Postal Service budget.

Ruiz said the outcome of any action taken by the Senate will not be known until late this afternoon, and that even if budget-reduction legislation is passed today the Postal Service will not have analyzed its effects until Monday.

Ruiz did speculate on a worst-case scenario, however.

He said that if the deficit-reduction measure is passed as drawn up, proposed construction, large and small, would probably be eliminated; existing smaller, rural offices would be eliminated; Saturday delivery in most locales would be eliminated; and window service hours could be cut.

According to Ruiz, proposed construction at 532 "smaller" sites across the nation would not be undertaken — a category Watsonville falls into.

Also, 70 "major" construction sites would be dropped from plans, including a multi-purpose Post Office in Los Angeles.

Ruiz said window hours could be cut back from eight to six hours and that Saturday service might possibly be "dropped."

Finally, Ruiz said that between 10,000 and 12,000 small post offices across the nation, most located in rural areas, would be closed.

Watsonville's new post office was to be the cornerstone for redevelopment in the city. The 25,000-square-foot, \$2.5 million building is proposed for a three-acre parcel on the 200 block of Main Street that sits adjacent to a 2.2-acre future commercial development. The City Council hopes to choose a developer for the commercial project

Tuesday.

The two sites were purchased by the city with \$6 million in redevelopment funds.

The reaction from city hall yesterday was one of concern. Mayor Betty Murphy expressed hope that since the city had already been paid by the Postal Service for the land, plans might proceed as scheduled.

But Murphy was concerned enough to see that a telegram was sent to the U.S. Senate, on the city's behalf, explaining how important the post office project is to Watsonville's redevelopment plans.